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**Infinite Majesty: Disabled and Athletic *Métis* in David Foster Wallace's
Tennis Writing**

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Report

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Abstract

Infinite Majesty: Disabled and Athletic *Métis* in David Foster Wallace's Tennis Writing

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As John Jeremiah Sullivan remarks in his introduction to *String Theory*, a collection of David Foster Wallace's essays on tennis, tennis "may be [Wallace's] most consistent theme at the surface level." As once an elite junior professional himself, Wallace reflects on and writes from his own involvement in the sport, with the conditioning, strategy, and body-mind training that goes into it. In other essays of *String Theory*, Wallace reaches beyond his personal playing experience, observes professional tennis players with their incredible grace, and creates his own tennis playing students in *Infinite Jest*. Throughout these fictional and nonfictional accounts, he conceptualizes what such eminent athleticism entails. This paper will show that celebrated athleticism in Wallace's work exhibits an embodied *métis*, or an acute, crafty body-mind knowledge of its movement through space. Beyond only characterizing athletic movement, however, this paper argues that the same concept of *métis* extends to people with disabilities, including characters with disabilities in *Infinite Jest*. The same hyperawareness of corporeality, versatile methods of adjusting to oppositional contexts,

and extraordinary complexity are shared by both groups. Using rhetorical scholarship on *métis* and disability theories of embodiment and social representation, this paper will draw parallels between the moving body-minds of athletic and disabled bodies and trace the implications of this analogy for Wallace's work and disability studies.

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Emotional Motion: Introduction to Wallace's Tennis Writing

Across his writings on tennis, David Foster Wallace finds order on the court in that which “the great tennis player knows” —the counterintuitive dictum to “[l]earn to do nothing, with your whole head and body (*Infinite Jest* 158). Wallace demonstrates how, in sports, cognition and affect are necessarily embodied, athletic exercises generated in concurrence with physical movement and non-rational thought. “Doing nothing” is a learned practice of the integrated body-mind, and the integrated body-mind learning to do nothing is the key to athletic triumph. Instead of the sport being significant beyond its own parameters, existing only as a distracting game, an isolated microcosm of reality, or a masculine hobby, it is something cerebral and embodied in itself. By neither using sports as metaphor nor his participation in sports as an object on which to write, Wallace in his tennis essay collection, *String Theory*, writes experiences of athletic bodies, body-minds in motion, that think and exist only within and through the athletic condition and bodily techniques they have developed therein. Like disability studies’ heightened awareness of embodiment and the entanglement of the physical, emotional, and intellectual, works attuned to the intricacies of athletic conditioning and the rhythms and repetitions of muscle memory underscore the notion of the body as a material and mental ordering principle and identity. This is not to reinscribe false boundary lines between the body, the mind, and the emotions and argue that the body is the preexisting container for or ultimate originary basis of self and identity; that is, this is not a dualistic conception of mind and body. Rather, Wallace’s writing on athleticism demonstrates what I will argue is *métis*, a rhetorical concept defined by rhetoricians as clever corporeal and cognitive knowledge in action.

This idea of *métis* carries through much of Wallace's portrayal of tennis in his 1996 novel, *Infinite Jest*, in both the bodily and mental conditioning of junior competitive tennis players at the Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA) as well as the corporeal choreography of these players during their matches. With grace and geometric precision, the students of ETA are athletic body-minds in motion being carefully conditioned to coordinate their minds' and bodies' timing. This proper coordination and attunement to their body-minds' perfectly-timed movements is what allows players to achieve tennis mastery and the highest rankings. Yet *métis* is not applied exclusively to athletic bodies in the novel, as a number of characters with mental and physical disabilities exemplify a similarly clever, embodied knowledge of their sociopolitical situation and navigate their circumstances accordingly. Instead of focusing only on the affective embodiment of athletes or the sport of tennis as constituted by emotional motion, Wallace extends his application of *métis* to non-athletic, and even stigmatized, disabled bodies to expose the likenesses between them, specifically their consciously embodied knowledge and modes of navigation.

Understanding athletic and disability *métis* as qualitatively analogous reveals the resemblances between what is taken as the supposedly enhanced bodily abilities of athletes in motion and the supposedly lacking abilities of people with disabilities. Wallace presents both athletic and disabled bodies as involving *métis* without privileging one form of *métis* over the other. In doing so, he makes explicit the always-present, but usually implicit, fact that all bodies in motion, athletic and disabled alike, are in constant fashioning and negotiation with their resources, configurations, and environments. Thus, the purportedly extreme able-bodiedness of professional tennis stars are generated by continuous body-mind modifications just as much as body-minds deemed disabled, ill, or pathological. This essay collapses the false distinction between the *métis* of athletic

bodies and disabled bodies both to elucidate Wallace's convoluted characterizations of athletics and disability and to demonstrate what the association of athletics and disability offers for disability studies scholarship. As I argue, David Foster Wallace's contemplation of tennis athletes' infinitely majestic play and disabled bodies' navigation of antagonistic environments exhibits how every body-mind in motion in every situation can refine *métis*. In addition, I show how his writing on tennis proves that bodies adored for being "super able-bodied" and bodies undervalued for being "less than abled-bodied" are fundamentally distinct only in their social representations.

Cunning Corporeality: *Métis* in Rhetorical Scholarship

While this essay applies *métis* to athletic and disabled bodies, the term is originally derived from rhetorical scholarship on clever forms of mental intelligence. Given that it concerns flexibility and evasive cunning, though, *métis* has been notoriously difficult to define in decades of rhetorical scholarship on the concept. In 1978, *métis* drew attention as a result of Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's examination of the idea in their book, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. After noticing how Greek scholarship had neglected the role of *métis* in Greek thought and mythology, Detienne and Vernant sought to show how *métis*, and the distinct kind of intelligence to which the term refers, plays a critical role in Greek thought from its origins. More specifically, they define *métis* as the "complex but very coherent body of intelligent behavior which combines flair, wisdom, forethought, [and] subtlety of mind," and recount particular instances in Greek myth wherein *métis* is operative (2-3). Suturing together linguistic studies, the history of technology, and Greek mythology, Detienne and Vernant define *métis* through "archaeological" reconstruction in order to unify its multiplicitous manifestations and wide-ranging appearances (3). They have "no simple or

easy reply to the questions” of *métis*’s nature because of its reference to a processual, rather than substantive, matter, but they contribute an unprecedented amount of research to the location of *métis* in Greek philosophy and mythology (2). Moreover, in wrestling with the slipperiness of the concept and attempting to assemble a vast collection of where *métis* appears in Greek myths, their methodological pursuits are in the spirit of *métis* itself.

Métis becomes somewhat more concrete as the concept is taken up in further research by rhetorician Debra Hawhee. Hawhee responds to Detienne and Vernant’s call for further investigation into the idea of *métis* by taking their abstract idea of the term and grounding it in physical embodiments. More specifically, Hawhee’s target in writing about *métis* is to recognize that studies of *métis* are unavoidably studies of its utilization and to argue for the necessarily corporeal nature of *métis* (even relating athletics and rhetoric through the notion of *métis*). Thus, to this end, Hawhee tracks *métis* as a “tacit style of movement” within certain mythological figures, modes of cognition, and contexts that do not readily support such movement or cognition (47). Hawhee uses transductive thought to extract features of *métis* in its mobile, embodied instantiations, such as “transformation and disguise,” disguise as identity, performativity, escaping, empowering the “weak,” and shape-shifting (57). Then, turning to Aristotle and Plato’s discourses on the sophists, who she argues embody *métis*, Hawhee supplements her idea of *métis* as necessarily corporeal and polymorphous. From Aristotelian philosophy, Hawhee highlights the idea of *hexis*, or the inextricability of bodily state and habits of the body. From Socratic philosophy, Hawhee emphasizes the *Sophist* dialogue in its representation of sophists as fishermen or hunters who adapt to their constantly changing environments by using masks and bodily distortions. Like the Greek tricksters, the sophists demonstrate that *métis* is concurrently cognitive and corporeal action in particular contexts. For

Hawhee, *métis*, “by its very nature, cannot be apprehended separately from its use” (46). “Contrary to logic,” *métis* “acknowledges a kind of immanence—it emerges as a part of particular situations, cunning encounters” (46). While Hawhee’s expansion upon Detienne and Vernant’s initial study of *métis* solidifies its necessary corporeality, she similarly explains *métis* through a few examples rather than an extricable definition.

Jay Dolmage builds upon Debra Hawhee’s expansion of Detienne and Vernant’s study of *métis* by championing the notion that rhetoric and *métis* are embodied and then exploring different valences of this corporeality. Most prominently, Dolmage focuses on the way that nonnormative embodiments and disabilities exemplify rhetorical *métis* by “forging something practical” out of their particular bodies and “changing the world as [they] move through it” (149). Dolmage performs a case study of the Greek god Hephaestus, who is frequently depicted as having a physical disability, in an effort to undermine the assumptions that traditional rhetorical studies take when thinking about what type of bodies with which features can practice rhetoric. Throughout his effort to “get the story [of Hephaestus and rhetorical history] crooked,” in the spirit of scholars looking to disrupt biased understandings of Western history, Dolmage presents the complexity of a variety of myths and media concerning Hephaestus (151). These accounts show that, not only does Hephaestus’s “disabled” body perform *métis*, but that this *métis* is rhetorical practice at its best. As Dolmage goes into specific presentations of Hephaestus, he argues that Hephaestus’s body allows him a “double and divergent orientation” that harbors an “oblique, surprising, [and] lateral form of knowledge and position” and a “threatening power”—an exemplary display of *métis* (159). Dolmage interweaves Hephaestus, *métis*, and rhetoric in a “sort of heuristic” or “interpretive machine” of questions pertaining to the representations of Hephaestus’s embodiment and corresponding rhetorical prowess to think about the ways in which bodily differences can

revolutionize traditional conceptions of rhetorical invention (176, 187). All of this—Dolmage’s composition of a “double and divergent narrative” of Hephaestus’s double and divergent narrative and his “resulting collage” of a chapter—was effectively crafty and, again, a style in the spirit of *métis* itself (168-169). However, Dolmage’s emphasis of the disabled body as “the” body of rhetoric and the epitome of *métis* too strictly delimits the range and application of *métis* to non-normative bodies of one sort in a limited type of situation. While Dolmage convincingly shows how disabled bodies perform *métis* exemplarily, due to their need to craftily navigate inaccessible environments, he does not think about how other bodies might enact entirely different strategic movements in environments wherein they face opponents.

Specifically, what current discourse on *métis* fails to attend to is how *métis* is not only a function of non-normative bodies that are disenfranchised in their environments, but also a complex intelligence cultivated by bodies that are privileged in Eurowestern societies. That is, *métis* is a concept that is particularly productive for characterizing the mental and physical grace of athletic bodies in motion, ones that are uniquely embodied and powered by a heightened, non-normative awareness of their own forms and techniques. This is not an effort to strip disabled bodies of a rare advantage and effective mode of navigation that they possess in disabling environments, but rather to demonstrate how certain exceptional embodiments are idealized while others are stigmatized even though the bodies are performing very similar, elaborate forms of bodily articulation. Building upon the features of *métis* as outlined by Detienne and Vernant, Hawhee, and Dolmage, I extend *métis*’s application to athletic embodiments and mentalities. While I use *métis* to incorporate an amalgamation of features heretofore attributed to the concept—namely, corporeality, cunning, and foresight—I see *métis* less as a cheating or deceitful maneuvering than an artful and dedicated cultivation of one’s body in an effort

to best oppositional forces. For athletes, this means beating an opponent, and for people with disabilities, this means outmaneuvering spaces and situations designed against non-normative embodiments. Rather than being something conniving, *métis* is most clearly framed in terms of the pillars of Greek speech and action. The *métis* of athletic bodies is not the wide margin of chance and variability to occur within an athletic match (*tuche*), not the sport itself or the equipment used in the sport (*techne*), nor only the precise timing of the athletic body in motion (*kairos*). The *métis* of the athletic body is that which so thoroughly knows and anticipates these correlative components of the sport, in body and mind, and proceeds to deploy this knowledge generatively in the midst of a highly volatile, constantly moving, decidedly complicated circumstance. It is an entire way of knowing that which is fickle and amorphous, and it is cultivated through a dedicated training of one's body and mind to use particular equipment, traverse inaccessible spaces, condition elements of one's physique and mentality, and do it all innovatively.

Complex and Extraordinary: Disabled and Athletic *Métis*

The athletic *métis* is an embodied consciousness that can be approached and witnessed by many people, but only enacted by particular bodies and minds keenly attuned to the dynamics of the sport. Non-athletic bodies and minds have a distinct *métis* that corresponds to non-athletic environments, resources, and protocols; however, none so closely aligns with the *métis* of the athletic body as the *métis* of the disabled body. Disability theorists examine the equipment, environments, and contingent abilities of different bodies in varying contexts in a way that closely relates to the questions surrounding athletic bodies and abilities. For instance, feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson focuses on what she calls the “extraordinary bodies” of people with disabilities, figures whose “corporeal otherness” has been marked as

“‘monstrosity,’ ‘mutilation,’ ‘deformation,’ ‘crippledness,’ or ‘physical disability’” (5). These bodies are rendered extraordinary by virtue of defying able-bodied standards of beauty and normalcy. They stand in opposition to what Garland-Thomson calls the “normate,” the “constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” because extraordinary bodies remain excluded from the social institutions and spaces in which normates establish command (8). Garland-Thomson’s project in showing this is to unveil the sociopolitical forces that work to create or exacerbate many disabilities in particular contexts and investigate the stereotypes that become attached to non-normate bodies.

In examining how inaccessible contexts render particular bodies marginalized and non-ordinary while portraying other bodies as normalized and ordinary, Garland-Thomson posits that “disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions” and not an individual, isolated feature of certain bodies (6). Rather than being inherently, completely, and always disabled, extraordinary bodies are actually ascribed labels of “corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (6). It is “the ways that bodies interact with the socially engineered environment and conform to social expectations” that renders bodies as normate or not normate (7). Athletic bodies are glorified for their ability to extraordinarily navigate certain limits of built environments with their speed, agility, or strength and flex their bodies beyond normative extensions, whether with athletic equipment or exercise. Bodies deemed disabled are disparaged for their extraordinary navigation of spaces with the use of different bodily attributes and prosthetics. Garland-Thomson’s work reveals how athletic bodies and disabled bodies,

rather than being qualitatively different in what they do, are both extraordinary in their non-normative embodiments and movements and coded with cultural appreciation or deprecation. Eradicating the “entrenched assumptions that ‘able-bodiedness’ and its conceptual opposite, ‘disability,’ are self-evident physical conditions,” Garland-Thomson confirms the fact that bodies “acquire the cultural meanings undergirding a hierarchy of bodily traits that determines the distribution of privilege, status, and power” (6). The able-bodied are not simply able-bodied by virtue of their embodiment, but by the environments in which their embodiments are supported. Additionally, the able-bodied are not accepted and accommodated only because they are able-bodied, but by social beliefs that able-bodiedness is preferable, desirable, and correct. Athletic bodies are “legitimated” because of their ostensible transcendence of able-bodied normativity, but, like disabled bodies that do not fit able-bodied standards, they are extraordinary bodies nonetheless (7). It is only because one is socially accepted and one is denounced in an ableist culture that athletes are revered and people with disabilities are rejected. In actuality, the extraordinariness of both non-normate groups operates in similar ways: by using particular tools or equipment to navigate a limited environment with one’s non-normative body and bodily attributes.

Disability theorist Tobin Siebers offers another way to frame the disabled body’s non-normative extraordinariness as corporeal and mental complexity. Just as Jay Dolmage does when he focuses on the concept of *métis* in terms of disability, Siebers theorizes identity in terms of disability. According to Siebers, the disabled body “opens the possibility of classifying identity as an embodied representational category, thereby inserting the body into debates about identity politics” (2-3). In a similar way, the athletic bodily identity is inextricable from the mind and the body. One of the most important implications for this intervention is that it exposes the implicit and widespread “ideology

of ability” that undergirds many conceptions of normativity and humanness (8). By listing many of its attributes, Siebers defines “the ideology of ability” in its superficial assumptions. For example, the ideology of ability claims that “[a]bility is the supreme indicator of value when judging human actions, conditions, thoughts, goals, intentions, and desires” (10). The able body “has a great capacity for self-transformation,” while the disabled body “is limited in what it can do and what it can be trained to do” (10). Because of its supposed physical limitations, the disabled body “experiences new situations as obstacles,” while the able body enjoys the luxury of being “not really aware of the body” because “[o]ne feels the body only when something goes wrong with it” (10). The ideology of ability presumes that the able body and mind is less focused on and locked in an embodiment because it possesses flexibility and potential for action. Siebers, however, upsets the ideology by showing that at the crux of these beliefs is actually a contradiction that simultaneously erases the body’s presence (saying that able-bodied people do not have a developed awareness of the body) and calls for people to make their bodies’ abilities as perfect as possible. The ideology of ability, therefore, creates disability through exclusion, and it makes liminal those embodiments and mentalities that make explicit the embodiedness of all abilities. The disabled body as well as the athletic body are rendered non-normative according to the ideology of ability, despite the fact that one is harmfully stigmatized and the other glorified.

In fact, Siebers’ way of counteracting the ideology of ability connects the intricacy of disabled bodies’ movement in inaccessible social contexts to the multifaceted movement of athletic bodies in motion. Siebers develops a “theory of complex embodiment” that “values disability as a form of human variation” by combining the medical and social models of disability (25). He thinks about both the social environment’s role in affecting bodily ability as well as the realities of bodily health in

even the most accessible of environments to show how the abilities of bodies are contingent upon a wide range of variable internal and external factors. The social and medical dimensions of embodiment are “reciprocal” and “mutually transformative” in their constitution of the body and mind’s experience in any given environment, since the body and mind cannot be separated or extracted from the situation, according to the theory of complex embodiment (25). This theory of complex embodiment, while emerging from a meditation on disabled bodies, extends to the embodiments of athletes in sporting contexts as well. Just as the disabled body’s navigation is limited or facilitated by social representations, infrastructural constructions, and physical and mental conditions outside of social creation, the athletic body is subject to the material realities of its playing environment and its physical condition beyond that environment. Although, of course, one is constantly and involuntarily subject to an inaccessible world and considered lesser in it, while the other is placed in such a context selectively and voluntarily and considered better in it.

The factor that most clearly links disabled and athletic bodies in the theory of complex embodiment is the idea that the body, according to Siebers, cannot be apprehended as “a garment, vehicle, or burden” because it is nothing short of “a complex system that defines our humanity, any knowledge that we might possess, and our individual and collective futures” (26). The body, both for people with disabilities and for athletes, cannot be ignored because the mind, the very entity used for perception is inextricably connected with the body and its mental processes are, in fact, bodily processes. Mental and social conceptions of disability and athleticism are generated, affected, and composed of bodily configurations and realities. Thus, the theory of complex embodiment is especially pivotal in how it can “give disabled people greater knowledge of and control over their bodies in situations where increased knowledge and

control are possible” (24). It illustrates the fact that embodiment for people with disabilities generates a specific mentality and knowledge of a situation that people less attuned to or aware of their physicality in any given moment might not have. In this way, Siebers reframes diverse disabilities, like athletic bodies in motion, as involving particular “tacit or embodied knowledge[s],” and he even goes so far as to recast “disability passing,” the attempt of some people with disabilities to downplay their disabilities to “pass” as able-bodied in whatever contexts they can, as “a form of embodied knowledge—forced into usage by prejudices against disability—about the relationship between the social environment and human ability” (24). Rather than being duplicitous “cowards, cheats, [or] con artists,” Siebers sees people with disabilities in both their celebration and occasional downplaying of their disabilities as employing *métis* and being “skillful interpreters of the world from whom we all might learn” (24). Disabled bodies and minds, rather than being denounced as lesser-abled or functioning in a simpler way than so-called able-bodies and minds, are complexly embodied and more situationally knowledgeable because of that embodiment.

Both Mental and Not: *String Theory*, Tennis, and *Métis*

And like the disabled body, the athletic body in motion is, if anything, extraordinary and complex. In his tennis essay collection, *String Theory*, David Foster Wallace thoroughly signals just how complex every single motion of the athletic body is, especially the well-conditioned motion of the athletic body in full performance. The essays convey the idea that the training involved in athletic conditioning and movement is a training of body and mind. I will, thus, refer to this body-mind training and knowledge in terms of the mover’s united embodimentality. Athletics, to Wallace, are a matter of body-mind strength over sheer physical prowess, and it takes an embodimental

conditioning to attune oneself to a sport. Wallace's writings on tennis, tennis tournaments, tennis professionals, tennis legends, tennis logistics, tennis equipment, tennis courts, tennis etiquette, and personal tennis playing experience demonstrate how tennis is an embodied way of living, thinking, being, and moving through the geometric limitations of spacetime.

The collection's introduction primes readers for Wallace's fascination with tennis, John Jeremiah Sullivan aptly noting that tennis "may be [Wallace's] most consistent theme at the surface level" because it is "as close as we come to physical chess, or a kind of chess in which the mind and body are at one in attacking essentially mathematical problems...the perfect game for Wallace" (xi). It is here, in the sacred geometry, geometric sacredness, mental physicality, and physical mentality of tennis that Wallace's fascination with tennis really resides. *String Theory's* first essay, "Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley" echoes this sentiment with Wallace's recollection of his own junior tennis career. In it, Wallace reveals his humble *métis* not, as may be expected, in his writing but in his playing tennis, as he could "think and play octacally" in a sport that requires "geometric thinking" (9). The fact that he "found [he] felt best physically enwebbed in sharp angles, acute bisections, shaved corners" allows him the physical and mental prowess to become "so prescient at using stats, surface, sun, gusts, and a kind of stoic cheer that [he] was regarded as a kind of physical savant" in tennis (10, 12). To Wallace, tennis requires physical strength and agility, but it even moreso requires "the ability to calculate not merely your own angles but the angles of response to your angles," a knowledge of one's own embodiedness and that embodiedness's movement in relation to moving parts (9). To be competitive in elite levels of play, the athletic body in movement must have a knowledge of something exponentially variable

and mutating, a *métis* of a body in flux and an environment in flux. The athletic body must have conditioning beyond physical training to succeed in a variable match.

The work of sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss captures the sort of mental and bodily knowledge that Wallace writes about in this essay and in subsequent tennis writings. Derived from his ethnographic observations and sociological explorations into the ways in which various societies from different eras and locations teach bodily movement traditions, Mauss's "Techniques of the Body" tracks and categorizes the "physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions" in a given context, or "the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies" (70). Mauss's concept of "bodily techniques" offers a productive framework for thinking about the body in motion as an assemblage of bodily techniques, learned and socialized processes of moving the body in particular ways for particular outcomes or activities—whether they be involuntary movements (like breathing), voluntary movements that are contingent upon certain embodied abilities (like walking), or extensions of simpler and more frequent movements (like sporting activities). Wallace's essays exhibit these bodily techniques that are not only physical, not only mental, but conditioned contextually, with embodied memory and execution. Athletic *métis* provides Wallace with an advantage over players physically stronger, but not embodiedly stronger, than he is. Known as "Slug" by his teammates because of his relative indolence, Wallace did not possess the same determination or effort in training as his "bigger, faster, more coordinated, and better-coached opponents"; yet, he was able to win against them because of his "cautious automatism" in tricky weather and playing conditions that allowed him to analyze the situation embodiedly ("Derivative Sport" 10).

More to Mauss's point, Wallace trains his holistic embodiedness in preparation for his matches rather than running drills mindlessly. Mauss argues that these bodily

techniques in all expressions are predicated upon learned techniques of movement and repetitions of those movements. Unlike purely physical training, though, Mauss's idea of training bodily techniques involves "technical education" and "apprenticeship" in situations that one must maneuver psychologically and emotionally, as well as physically (71-72). Following this same understanding, Wallace does not rely on physical conditioning, muscle memory, and endurance alone in conditions that would not facilitate their fullest expression. During matches in which he is a clear underdog, Wallace employed a kind of "verve" and "imagination" in being able to "expand [his] logistical territory to countenance the devastating effect a 15- to 30-mph stutter-breeze swirling southwest to east would have on [his] best calculations as to how ambitiously to respond to Joe Perfectchair's topspin drive into [his] backhand corner" ("Derivative Sport" 11). Wallace wins many matches because of his foresight and embodied sense of his very involved environment that allows him to adapt to his opponent, his resources, and the match conditions.

Wallace's complex embodiment awareness enacts the sort of bodily techniques that Mauss describes. To characterize bodily techniques further, Mauss brings what he deems the tripartite—physical, psychical, and sociological—"habitus" of the body to the forefront and explains,

These habits do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, properties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties...it [is] not possible to have a clear idea of all these facts about running, swimming, etc., unless one introduced a triple consideration instead of a single consideration, be it mechanical and physical, like an anatomical and physiological theory of walking...It is the triple viewpoint, that of the "total man" that is needed. (73)

In his description of his own embodimentality in action, David Foster Wallace shows his tennis skill to be a concrete example of Mauss's tripartite habitus. To Mauss, any physical action is a "gymnic art perfected in its own day," contingent upon the situational assembly of technical and societal education, and the "concourse of the body and moral or intellectual symbols" (71, 76). The sociological and physical conditioning of the body, produces movements that are physio-psycho-sociological bodily techniques rather than only physical movements. Following this same idea, instead of coming into the game with his physical skillset solidified, Wallace generates an embodied skillset and movement practice given the pressures of the unique circumstance. Throughout his play in the "Illinois combination of pocked courts, sickening damp, and wind," he learns that the "wind required and rewarded an almost Zen-like acceptance of things as they actually were, on-court" and deploys a *métis* that anticipates the fluctuation of things as uncertain as the blowing of the wind ("Derivative Sport" 11). Fittingly, then, it is when these variations were lessened by more elaborate stadiums and court materials that Wallace became less competitive. "Without deformities to play around," Wallace lost his "inner boundary, [his] own personal set of lines" and was "disabled because [he] was unable to accommodate the absence of disabilities to accommodate" (16). With the installation of arenas and equipment that cater exclusively to physical strength, Wallace lost his counterintuitive advantage of being less physically dominant in an unsophisticated venue.

The proceeding essays in *String Theory* extend Mauss's foundation of the embodied physio-psycho-sociological training to professional tennis players. Moving beyond his own *métis*, Wallace turns to the *métis* that constitutes elite athletic greatness in "How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart." By combining both the trained skill and discipline of his teammates and opponents as well as the embodied acuity of his in-game knowledge, Wallace arrives at a description of legendary athletes. In this

description, his essay moves from displaying only Maussian tripartite bodily techniques to explaining the embodied *métis* of athletic bodies in motion. Thus, he activates the rhetorical discourse of *métis*, particularly that of Debra Hawhee's *Bodily Arts*. Just as Mauss thinks about the physio-psycho-sociological training of bodies, Hawhee thinks about *métis* in terms of bodily techniques, "a consideration of ancient bodies and bodily arts that would examine the way identity and value circulate through particular bodies as they practice and perform various arts" (4). Like Mauss's idea of physio-psycho-sociological bodily techniques, Hawhee's idea of bodily arts is an embodied bodily artistry predicated upon the Greek concept of *hexis*, "a readable disposition and manner, a bodily comportment...bound up with the more abstract ancient notion of *aretē*, or virtuosity" (4-6). Wallace's interpretation of tennis stars engender this virtuosity wholeheartedly. Describing Tracy Austin, Wallace remarks, "Great athletes are profundity in motion. They enable abstractions like *power* and *grace* and *control* to become not only incarnate but televisable" (26). For Wallace, world class tennis requires "extraordinary mental powers" of "geniuses-in-motion," a *métis* that anticipates opponents' movements before and during one's own skillful, strategic motion (37). Elite tennis players take physio-psycho-sociological bodily techniques into embodied *métis* by mobilizing their body-mind awareness and virtuous dispositions.

More specifically, as Mauss and Hawhee theorize and Wallace affirms, the best athletes perform embodied brilliance without conscious rationalization of their every movement. Mauss defines his concept of "dexterity" through "people with a sense of all their well co-ordinated movements to a goal, who are practised, who 'know what they are up to'" without constantly making logical, or purely mental, decision to have a grasp on what they are doing (78). "Craft" or "Cleverness," to Mauss, involves a "presence of mind and habit combined" that distinguishes athletic movement from the realm of pure

physicality or pure mentality and represents it as a non-rational embodied process (78). Wallace's take on athletic embodiment emphasizes its nature as both mental and not. A top athlete can "make a certain type of genius as carnally discernible as it ever can get," even though, as his main argument in the Tracy Austin essay states, they may not be able to verbally convey this genius (28). In fact, as Wallace concludes, therein lies the genius to the great athletes' game—a knowledge so mentally embodied that the logical mind seems not to be present during the articulation of *métis* in athletic movement. As Wallace divulges, "[t]he real, many-veiled answer to the question of just what goes through a great player's mind as he stands at the center of hostile crowd-noise and lines up the free-throw that will decide the game might well be: *nothing at all*" (38). The knowledge of the sport and the movement is so deeply embodied that athletes do not rationally calculate every hit, stroke, or action. It is certainly not a lack of knowledge that prevents these athletes from speaking to their skill or experiences in games, as Wallace challenges "[a]nyone who buys the idea that great athletes are dim should have a close look at an NFL playbook, or at a basketball coach's diagram of a 3-2 zone trap," but it is rather a nonverbal, embodied knowledge that expresses its genius through motion (37). It is only when athletes can "[c]ease to be wholly present in [their] wills and choice and movements," only when they can, "in performance, be totally present: they can proceed on instinct and muscle-memory and autonomic will such that agent and action are one," that a skilled athlete operates with an embodied *métis* (37-38). The athletic embodiment, in both rigid training and endless physical conditioning, is a non-rationally intellectual, emotional knowledge-base and an affective register for embodied and abstract artistry.

The athletic embodiment that produces a non-logical corporeal knowledge, however, does not take only one form. As Wallace's essay on other tennis professionals

reveal, *métis* takes many different embodimental forms and adapts to many different situations. Similarly, Hawhee's idea of *métis* involves the thorough mastery of one's particular physio-psycho-sociological bodily techniques to produce aesthetic spectacles or impressive efficiency of the body at work. Adding to Mauss's idea of merely having bodily techniques that reveal deeper things about one's self, Hawhee's notion of *métis* transfers having bodily techniques to doing bodily techniques. The key turn here is that, while *métis* involves *hexis*, or bodily techniques that are "indistinguishable from habits and practices," it also *incorporates* it (58). *Métis* is that which "cultivates multiple hexeis, that have the capacity for changing in response to particular situations," and that distinction of being able to change "makes all the difference" (58). Because it is ever-changing, *métis* is not contingent upon a determined embodiment, type of body, or particular *hexis*, and, instead, it involves the bodily doings and fluid assemblages of hexeis as agile embodimentalities. Rather than achieving a certain type of body or conditioning the body to achieve efficiency in one set way with one particular type of embodiment, *métis* entails adroitly engaging your particular embodimentality to be hyperaware of its doings and sensitive to its complex workings during any given movement.

In the third and final essays of *String Theory*, which concentrate on the athleticism of Michael Joyce and Roger Federer respectively, Wallace confirms Hawhee's notion that *métis* does not require one standard physical body or one type of physical expression. In fact, he challenges the very notion that *métis* is something physical, permanently achievable, or unchanging. For Joyce, Wallace shows that the strictly physical is not enough to contend with the *métis* of the best players. For Federer, who is one of the best players, Wallace shows that it is not in having a normative athletic body that grants him *métis*; rather, it is in having flexibility in one's embodimentality that

fashions *métis*. When watching Joyce, Wallace remarks on the skill of his game that necessitates “body control, hand-eye coordination, quickness, flat-out speed, endurance, and that strange mix of caution and abandon we call courage” but also a sort of bodily “smarts” that anticipates “the tree of variables and determinants” in space and time that spawns from every shot (“Michael Joyce” 65). With his observation of Roger Federer, Wallace highlights the *métis* of his “kinetic beauty,” or what he describes as “human beings’ reconciliation with the fact of having a body,” and his exercising of his aesthetic bodily recognition and intelligence on the court (“Roger Federer” 119). According to Wallace, Federer is “a creature whose body is both flesh and, somehow, light,” who operates on the “muscular and neurological...‘kinesthetic sense,’ meaning the ability to control the body and its artificial extensions through complex and very quick systems of tasks” (128, 130-131). Through the juxtaposition of what he profiles in Michael Joyce’s game and subsequently in Roger Federer’s game, David Foster Wallace shows the difference between good players with physical prowess and truly great tennis players with *métis*. The player with *métis* is embodimentally refined and marked by his aptitude for changeability, while the player without is skilled at routine physical tasks. Joyce is physically advanced and bodily-dependent, while Federer is something entirely transcendent of physical strength with his embodimental knowledge and its “artificial extensions.”

When further describing Michael Joyce and tennis players of his caliber, that is, professional players in the top tier of the game but who are not ranked quite high enough to be internationally renowned, Wallace expounds mainly upon the physicality of the game. He details the gritty realities of playing tennis, the bodily functions and exertions of effort, in addition to the physical measurements and characteristics of the players. Furthermore, he inventories and reviews the material aspects of the equipment and

surfaces of the sport, like the racket technology, the composition and outline of the court, and the placement of the players on the court depending on different styles of play. When observing these tennis professionals, Wallace claims that there are “a million little ways you can tell that somebody’s a great player,” and they are all attributes of bodily comportment: “details in his posture, in the way he bounces the ball with his racket-head to pick it up, in the casual way he twirls the racket while waiting for the ball” (“Michael Joyce” 53). He even delves into the “pros’ tics,” the “little extraneous tics, stylistic fingerprints” that all skilled players have “because of years of repetition and ingraining” (62). He dissects the nuances between different players’ grips, footing, and strokes and explores the tremendous impact these miniscule physical adjustments can make, but ultimately considers the physically great players to fall short of tennis mastery and *métis*. Michael Joyce, according to Wallace and his own coach, “doesn’t ‘see’ the ball in the same magical way that Andre Agassi [a top tennis legend] does,” and, therefore, does not play the ball in the same magical way that a player whose “vision is literally one in a billion” does (64-65). Although he has somewhat achieved the sort of “radical compression of his attention and self” that it takes to “become a transcendent practitioner of an art,” he does not quite possess the “vision and timing” of *métis* that complements and completes the most elite athletes (81). He is, in many cases, a tennis star; yet, his skill is limited by its enormous amount of physical strength and stamina that overshadows an embodiment focus on the pacing and finesse of the game.

Roger Federer, in contrast, stands as the quintessence of *métis*, an athletic embodiment that extends far beyond physical dexterity. Comparing the titles of the essays alone reveals a discrepancy between the ways that Wallace views the two players—“Tennis Player Michael Joyce’s Professional Artistry as a Paradigm of Certain Stuff about Choice, Freedom, Limitation, Joy, Grotesquerie, and Human Completeness”

versus “Federer Both Flesh and Not.” From the way that the players are presented in them, Joyce has a “professional artistry” that is complete in humanness, or that which is physical and bound by spatiotemporal issues of “freedom,” “choice,” and “limitation.” On the contrary, Federer exceeds the parameters of physicality and is something embodimentally beyond, as he is both physical flesh “and not.” Instead of investigating the physical and material components of Federer’s game, in the way that he did Joyce’s, Wallace essay on Federer is “about a spectator’s experience of Federer” and observing what he calls “Federer Moments” that incite bodily reactions from their viewers like dropped jaws and expanded eyes (“Both Flesh and Not” 119, 117). Federer, unlike Joyce, “is able to see, or create, gaps and angles for winners that no one else can envision” and has a foresight that allows him to orchestrate “spectacular-looking angles and winners” many shots ahead of their execution (125). Beyond having a physicality trained for tennis movement and practiced in athleticism, Federer engenders the embodimental understanding of how to deploy those movements in a game. His training is “both muscular and neurological. Hitting thousands of strokes, day after day, develops the ability to do by ‘feel’ what cannot be done by regular conscious thought,” thus it is *métis* that enables Federer an embodimental prowess on the court that far exceeds the ability of even the strongest or most able-bodied player in the game (131). Federer, to Wallace, has an exemplary tennis *métis*, a player with the physicality and embodimentality to capitalize on such physicality. As he puts it,

Roger Federer is a first-rate, kick-ass power-baseliners. It’s just that that’s not all he is. There’s also his intelligence, his occult anticipation, his court sense, his ability to read and manipulate opponents, to mix spins and speeds to misdirect and disguise, to use tactical foresight and peripheral vision and kinesthetic range instead of just rote pace—all this has exposed the limits, and possibilities, of men’s tennis as it’s not played...Roger Federer is showing that the speed and strength of today’s pro game are merely its skeleton, not its flesh. He has,

figuratively and literally, re-embodied men's tennis, and for the first time in years the game's future is unpredictable. (137-138)

In this formulation, Federer has "re-embodied" tennis as something exceeding the physical senses, skills, and structure of the body as something somatic. Beyond mere physical body and mere mental knowledge, Federer is a transcendent player with a profoundly athletic embodimentality. Throughout every essay, and especially his discourse on Roger Federer, Wallace remains engrossed in the idea of *métis* in the art of tennis athleticism and the bodily knowledge and emotion that it reveals.

While he might not be the strongest, fastest, smartest, or most traditionally able-bodied body, Federer's demonstrably supreme embodimentality speaks to the power of *métis* to traverse set parameters and physical limitations. In terms reminiscent of Garland-Thomson's idea of "extraordinary bodies," Wallace describes Roger Federer as "one of those rare, preternatural athletes who appear to be exempt, at least in part, from physical laws," a "genius, or mutant, or avatar," a "creature whose body is both flesh and, somehow, light" ("Both Flesh and Not" 127-128). It is not an overcoming of his extraordinary embodimentality to achieve great physical feats, but rather a particular orchestration of his physiomental movements and knowledge that allows him to dominate in an environment in which he is not physically dominant in terms of muscle, speed, or stamina. Save for a few components of the sport, tennis and many sports are not a matter of sheer able-bodied superiority; they are "a matter not of strength but of timing" and of embodimental conditioning beyond muscle building ("Michael Joyce" 64). Just as the rhetorical conceptions of *métis*, as presented by Jay Dolmage and Debra Hawhee, showed disabled Greek gods to cross environments that exclude them and best opponents that were more "able-bodied" than they were in areas of speed and strength, David Foster Wallace shows elite athletes to beat more physically able opponents with a masterful embodimentality, or *métis*.

In his tennis essays, David Foster Wallace demonstrates the way that Marcel Mauss and Debra Hawhee frame the movements of the body and athletic techniques as multifaceted bodily techniques that have been conditioned from excessive training and cultural exposure. Like Mauss's work on bodily techniques generated from physical, cultural, emotional, and motional practices, Wallace's essays on tennis exemplify the inextricability of the body-mind and his belief that all writing and movement is a "co"-compositional expression of these parts. In thinking about sports experiences in terms of body-minds in motion, Wallace contemplates and recounts the routine, disciplining, and exercises of the moving bodies in nonfictional and fictional accounts of others' and his own tennis training. And, like Hawhee's work on embodimentality in motion, Wallace's work shows the *métis* of moving athletic embodimentalities. This is even true for the collection's fourth essay, which strays from its focus on "Democracy and Commerce at the U.S. Open" to consider the "special kind of emotional flexibility" needed to supplement the physical endurance of tournament participants (102). It is in this enthrallment with emotional flexibility that Wallace's most illuminating insights on the thinking, feeling athletic body surface and radiate. For this reason, *String Theory* offers an insightful exposition of *métis*. Throughout *String Theory*, Wallace offers incredible depictions of tennis stars' embodied feelings and movements and, thus, exemplifies the power of the cleverly thinking athletic body in the rigidly bounded and isolating game of tennis.

Infinitely Majestic Play: *Infinite Jest*, Tennis, Disability, and *Métis*

David Foster Wallace more fully portrays manifestations of *métis* in tennis players in his 2006 novel, *Infinite Jest*, with elite junior tennis players at Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.). Its attendees are not only physically superior, but intellectually

proficient student-athletes. One of these student-athletes and a central character of the novel, seventeen-year-old Hal Incandenza, demonstrates an athletic *métis* similar to the tennis professionals detailed in *String Theory*. The novel takes place in a near future time where years have become subsidized by major corporations and, in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, Hal's tennis career takes him from a national ranking of number 43 to number four (*Infinite Jest* 259-260). Not changing in physical stature nor mental aptitude, Hal's "delicate...spinny, rather cerebral game hasn't altered," but it has "grown a beak" (260). More specifically, he has changed his embodied posture to the game, as Hal is "[n]o longer fragile or abstracted-looking on court, he seems now almost to hit the corners without thinking about it" (260). This game and this suspended rational consciousness in favor of a more embodied knowledge base lead him to newfound victory. Since he cannot beat someone aggressively and forcefully, relying on mere physicality alone, and because tennis requires embodied movement that prevents it from being a strictly mental battle, Hal's tactical game is one that configures his mental and physical skills discerningly. His game is one of "attrition" in which "he'll probe, pecking, until some angle opens up. Until then he'll probe. He'd rather run his man ragged, wear him down" rather than combat him using their respective physical arsenals only (260). By switching his game from getting defeated by stronger opponents in physical competitions and self-defeating by getting caught up in his head, Hal refines an athletic *métis* that enables him to move up the tennis rankings.

A similar trajectory exists for Ted Schacht, an E.T.A. student with Crohn's Disease and a knee injury that has taken him out of serious contention for the highest ranking, whose "tennis seems to have improved...since he stopped really caring" about winning, thinking that he cannot (266). "It's like his hard flat game stopped having any purpose beyond itself and started feeding on itself and got fuller, looser, its edges less

jagged,” once he could not rely on his physical strength alone and needed to position his body and mind more strategically in matches (266). Schacht begins to echo the idea that “[c]ompetitive tennis is largely mental, once you’re at a certain plateau of skill and conditioning” because it takes a knowledge of the body and its navigation through space to orchestrate effective shots and returns (269). Thinking about tennis as a physically-informed mentality that works best without conscious rationalization of every move instead of as something to physically dominate urges Hal and Schacht to perform not only physically and not only mentally, but with an embodied *métis*. Aside from those who have recently cultivated forms of *métis*, the best tennis player at E.T.A., John “No Relation” Wayne, has possessed a similar sort of finely polished tennis *métis* since childhood that makes him so dominant. With his game “[t]here’s surprisingly little thought” and an “automatic beauty” to the way he travels the court and preempts his opponents’ strokes (260). Wallace depicts John Wayne’s movement as something graceful and natural, like “post-pirouette backward inertia,” and his emotions as “emerg[ing] in terms of velocity” (261, 263). His mastery of the sport clearly comes from a fusion of body and mind, in which his physical movements are measured in terms of virtuosity and his emotional feelings are presented in terms of their spatiality. Without an intertwined coalescence of body and mind into a cunning embodimentality, E.T.A. students cannot compete with the most elite players, regardless of how intelligent or strong they are. It is upon developing and enacting a tennis *métis* that they embodimentally grasp the contours of the game and can maneuver its confines using the resources and skills that they have.

What is even more interesting about *Infinite Jest*’s exploration of *métis*, however, is how Wallace also locates *métis* beyond tennis and in the embodimentalities of characters with physical and mental disabilities. One of the novel’s major plot threads

follows Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents/The Wheelchair Assassins (A.F.R.), a Québécois terrorist group, in their convoluted and strategic efforts to secure the original copy of a mind-consuming film, “Infinite Jest,” to use against United States citizens. Even though they are named for their disabilities and villainized throughout the novel for their insidious political agenda, Wallace shows how even their violent origins and plots possess *métis*. Like the exemplars of *métis* with disabilities that Hawhee and Dolmage discuss, the A.F.R.’s offensive strikes “must not be direct” and are stopped only in the face of “tall and steep hillsides” that they cannot circumvent by means of outmaneuvering environmental obstacles (*Infinite Jest* 845). As readers learn from E.T.A. student James Struck’s research on the subject, the “legless Quebecker Wheelchair Assassins, although legless and confined to wheelchairs, nevertheless contrive to have situated large reflective devices across odd-numbered United States highways for the purpose of disorienting and endangering northbound Americans” (1056 n304). A.F.R. not only can mobilize widespread political agendas, but they use their particular embodied insight to dismantle the infrastructure by which able-bodied citizens more easily and mindlessly travel by messing with the U.S. highways and interfering with pipelines and waste management across the country (1056 n304). In addition, in A.F.R.’s brutal attacks on Canadian officials who refuse to yield to their demands, they are “masters of stealth...affording no warning excepting the ominous squeak of slow wheels, striking swiftly and without warning” (1056 n304). And this calculation and secrecy makes them “more difficult for responsible authorities to anticipate, control, interdict, or reason with than even the most passionate U.S. kabals” (1056 n304). The A.F.R.’s intelligence is expertly deployed and not able to be comprehended logically, since it is an embodied understanding that allows them to assess situations flexibly and enact their plans accordingly.

Beyond their current agenda, the A.F.R. group identity originates in a game of great chance, risk, and *métis*—a ceremony of embodied movement that comes to define their status, physicality, and embodiment awareness. Their group rituals, as Struck reads, are “intimately bound up with ‘*Les jeux pour-memes*,’ formal competitive games whose end is less any sort of ‘prize’ than it is a manner of basic identity: i.e., that is, ‘game’ as metaphysical environment and psychohistorical locus and gestalt” and, thus, require a holistic, embodied knowledge base to play them expertly (1058 n304). More specifically, their central competition, “*La Culte du Prochain Train*”/ “The Cult of the Next Train,” involves a game of mental quickness, careful timing, and embodiment awareness of one’s body in relation to other moving bodies.

‘Le Jeu du Prochain Train itself is simplicity in motion. The object: Be the last of your round’s six to jump from one side of the tracks to the other—that is, across the tracks—before the train passes. Your only real opponents are your six’s other five. Never is the train itself regarded as an opponent. The speeding, screaming train is regarded rather as le jeu’s boundary, arena, and reason. Its size, its speed down the extremely gradual north-to south grade of what was then southwestern Quebec, and the precise mechanical specifications of each schedule train—these are known to the directeurs, they comprise the constants in a game the variables of which are the respective wills of the six ranged along the track, and their estimates of which are the respective wills of the six ranged along the track, and their estimates of one another’s will to risk all to win.’ (1059 n304)

It is a game not unlike tennis in its strict geometric proportions, individual opposition to a variety of fickle and antagonistic forces, and necessary physical and mental keenness of one’s footing and timing. Furthermore, it is a game only mastered by the “nerveless and self-contained virtuosos” who “frequently close their eyes entirely as they wait, trusting the railroad ties’ vibration and the whistle’s pitch, as well as intuition, and fate, and whatever numinous influences lie just beyond fate”; in other words, the players must develop an embodiment knowledge, one that supplements basic empirical evidence and physical positioning with a deeper attunement to one’s environment and the fluidity of the game

(1060 n304). While having a less refined sense of *métis* in this game and misreading the situation can result in severe physical injuries and death, it also can lead to a player cultivating *métis* as a Wheelchair Assassin. Either way, *métis* here is inextricably tied to the A.F.R., disabled bodies, and their cunning escapades.

The conflation of athleticism, disability, and *métis* in the novel also appears in a more direct way during a short vignette on blindness and tennis conditioning. Idris Arslanian, a young E.T.A. student being used as the tennis coaches' guinea pig, is stranded outside the school's weight room, blindfolded, desperately fumbling around trying to find a bathroom. When Schacht runs into him, Idris explains that the blindfold is part of a training experiment that E.T.A.'s Coach Thorp is mandating, to emulate Dymphna, an even younger, but prodigious, tennis player with a visual impairment slated to attend E.T.A. the following year. At nine years old, Dymphna is top-ranked for all players up to twelve years old, and Coach Thorp believes that "the highness of the ranking may be due to the blindness itself" (568). Schacht discredits his high-ranking as being "real high-ranked" only "for a blind, soft-skilled kid," but the coaches identify something different about Dymphna's game (568). Idris relays the difference as being in Dymphna's "anticipation," an "excellence in anticipation in the blind because of hearing and sounds, because sounds are merely... 'Variations in Intensity'" and he can "judge the opponent player's VAPS [Vector/Angle/Pace/Spin] in more detail by the ear than the eye" (568, 1044 n236). Supposedly, "[t]his is explaining why the highly ranked Dymphna appears to always have floated by magic to the necessary spot where a ball is soon to land," when, in actuality, that ability is not a simple equation of senses, as if tennis plus hearing minus sight equals athletic acuity (568). In fact, the idea that Dymphna is able to play prodigiously by the amplification of somatic sense alone is shown to be downright comical. Allegedly, Dymphna is able to "judge the necessary spot

of landing by the intensity of the sound of the ball against the opponent's string," or by only physical means (568). But, when Idris attempts to play tennis by ear, he "frequently faced the wrong direction for play" and "frequently judged by the intensity of balls struck on adjacent courts and ran onto adjacent courts, intruding on play," thus wildly failing at playing tennis without his sight (568). The problem here, of course, is that Dymphna does not rely on particular physical features alone, but the embodimentality trained by virtue of having particular physical or mental capacities. It is not only the particular combination of physical features that defines Dymphna, but the shrewd implementation of his knowledge from physical training and navigation with particular physical resources that generates a distinctive *métis*. Not unlike John Wayne, Dymphna does not use only physical senses or objects to have an elevated sense of awareness on the court, nor does he use entirely non-physical reasoning through the matches. Instead, he uses the embodimentality he has to assess, feel, and comprehend the space physiomentally, to know where shots will land and how to return them effectively. The athletic body and the disabled body, in this episode, are likened in their extraordinariness and *métis*.

Emily Russell draws a similar conclusion between the ways that athletic bodies and disabled bodies are both extraordinary in the text, while conventionally being framed as more-than-ordinary and less-than ordinary, respectively. Russell picks up on disability theorist Lennard Davis's idea that the bodies that are considered the "norm" have actually become "ideal" and "by definition, can never be found in the world" due to their fallacious position as "something that is not only attainable, but already widely attained" (qtd. in Davis 25). These ostensibly "normal" bodies, like athletic bodies, are really falsely ideal bodies that create so-called disability by contrast. Russell deconstructs this false binary between normal and abnormal bodies and argues that the disabled and athletic characters in *Infinite Jest* are notably similar in their make-ups. In addition to

disabled characters like the A.F.R., the gargantuan infants, the “Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed,” the athletes in the novel “offer a visual representation of the broader phenomenon of corporeal assemblage” (147, 150). The athletes do not constitute a fantasized wholeness and unified strength, but they are fragmented in a way that is typically only attributed to bodies and minds with disabilities. With asymmetric limbs and morphing forms, the athletic bodies in Wallace’s novel demonstrate the fact that all physical capacity and form, regardless of how able and enduring it may seem, are “fleeting” and constructed, not natural and infinite (150). To Russell, while athletic bodies are supposedly “superabled,” their “relentless conditioning results in hypertrophy, joint disorders, exaggerated appetites, and exhaustion...blur[s] the line between abled, disabled, and superabled, reminding us that these division are flexible and not naturally determined” (148).

What this does not factor in, though, is the idea that athletic bodies, even without evident bodily anomaly, extreme physical difference, or grotesquely hypertrophied parts, can be akin to disabled bodies in the way they move about their limited spheres. Whereas Russell takes these extraordinary bodies as metaphor, claiming that Wallace uses them as hosts for a larger point about the disjointed experience of reading the novel itself, a focus on *métis* shows the literal importance of considering athletic and disabled bodies as similarly extraordinary, but coded entirely differently in cultural estimations of them. The connection between E.T.A.’s tennis stars and the disabled characters in the novel is an embodied one. The correspondence is not one that holds only when athletes are construed as misshapen, and it is not one that takes the movement of disabled bodies as figurative. Wallace proves that athletic and disabled embodiednesses in their very movements are kindred. Beyond narratively stating that these bodies have similar constructions, *Infinite Jest* makes explicit athletic and disabled bodies’ shared reliance on

particular embodied *métis*, even if the two groups have entirely different physical and mental looks and functions.

Conclusions

Above all, David Foster Wallace's dedicated portrayals of athletic embodiedness in motion confirms the complexity and extraordinariness of those forms. He concurrently underscores how athletic embodiedness is conditioned and contingent modes of navigation like the movement of all complex, extraordinary embodiments, especially those with disabilities. Although these embodied practices concentrate in non-normative and disabled bodies and abilities and proceed to put them in conversation with ideals of flawlessness, grace, and embodiedness, *métis* is not a contradictory idea or one that can only extend to normative bodies. In fact, *métis*, by definition, refuses to consider any physical form as ideal in and of itself, and it does not require that a body can perform any particular abilities for its instantiation. Moreover, *métis* frames prosthetic bodily extensions as resourceful and dexterous, whether in the form of material objects or other people; likewise, it casts unconventional bodily movements and features that frequently render certain bodies "disabled"—whether it be a mobility, cognitive, or sensory impairment—as some of the many diverse forms of being and doing in the world. After all, as Dolmage explains, *métis* is "the craft of forging something practical out of these possibilities" and "changing the world as we move through it," no matter how it is that we do so (149). Certainly some bodies and ways of moving and thinking are accommodated, privileged, and even revered in the case of elite athletes, but what David Foster Wallace's writing of these idealized bodies can show is that they are really exercising *métis* of their particular embodiednesses. Athletic bodies are not just really good bodies to be emulated and fetishized, and disabled bodies are not

bad bodies to be pitied and diminished. Both athletic and disabled bodies are infinitely majestic in their *métis*, and it is a matter of representation that falsely and qualitatively differentiates their embodimentalities.

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